

Piute Cypress

CA-010-046

PIUTE CYPRESS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-046)

1. THE STUDY AREA --- 5,213 acres

The Piute Cypress WSA is located in Kern County, approximately three miles southwest of the town of Lake Isabella. The WSA is a joint Bureau of Land Management (BLM)/United States Forest Service (USFS) Study Area with 3,453 acres of BLM land and 1,760 acres USFS land totaling 5,213 acres. No private inholdings are located within the WSA (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is bounded on the north and east by private land and Erskine Creek Road, and on the south and west by Saddle Springs Road.

The heart of the unit is the piute cypress grove. This dense grove of dwarf piute cypress grows on the steep north-facing slope of Bald Eagle Peak. The lower slopes are digger pine, California juniper and dense brush. The steep, rocky, south- and west-facing slopes are dense chaparral. The piute cypress groves have been designated as a BLM Natural Area and USFS Botanical Area in order to preserve the natural values of this unique relict species. The WSA lies within the 306,422 acre Monache-Walker Pass National Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area (NCLWMA) established on January 26, 1962 by Public Land Order 2594. The NCLWMA is cooperatively managed with the California Department of Fish and Game under current public land laws.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Prior to this, in 1980, the Bureau prepared a Wilderness Study Report on the Piute Cypress Instant Study Area - a 760-acre parcel included in the present WSA. The recommendation of this report was to defer a recommendation on the parcel until it could be studied with the additional adjacent USFS and BLM land. Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for the Central California Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the Final EIS. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2.	<u>RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE</u> ---	0	acres recommended for wilderness
		5,213	BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in the WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The no-wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The WSA is recommended nonsuitable. The high potential for the development of locatable mineral resources, continued execution of fire management plans, the degree of community development adjacent to the boundaries, and continuance of the Monache-Walker Pass NCLWMA outweigh the area's wilderness values. In addition, effective management of the area as wilderness would be difficult.

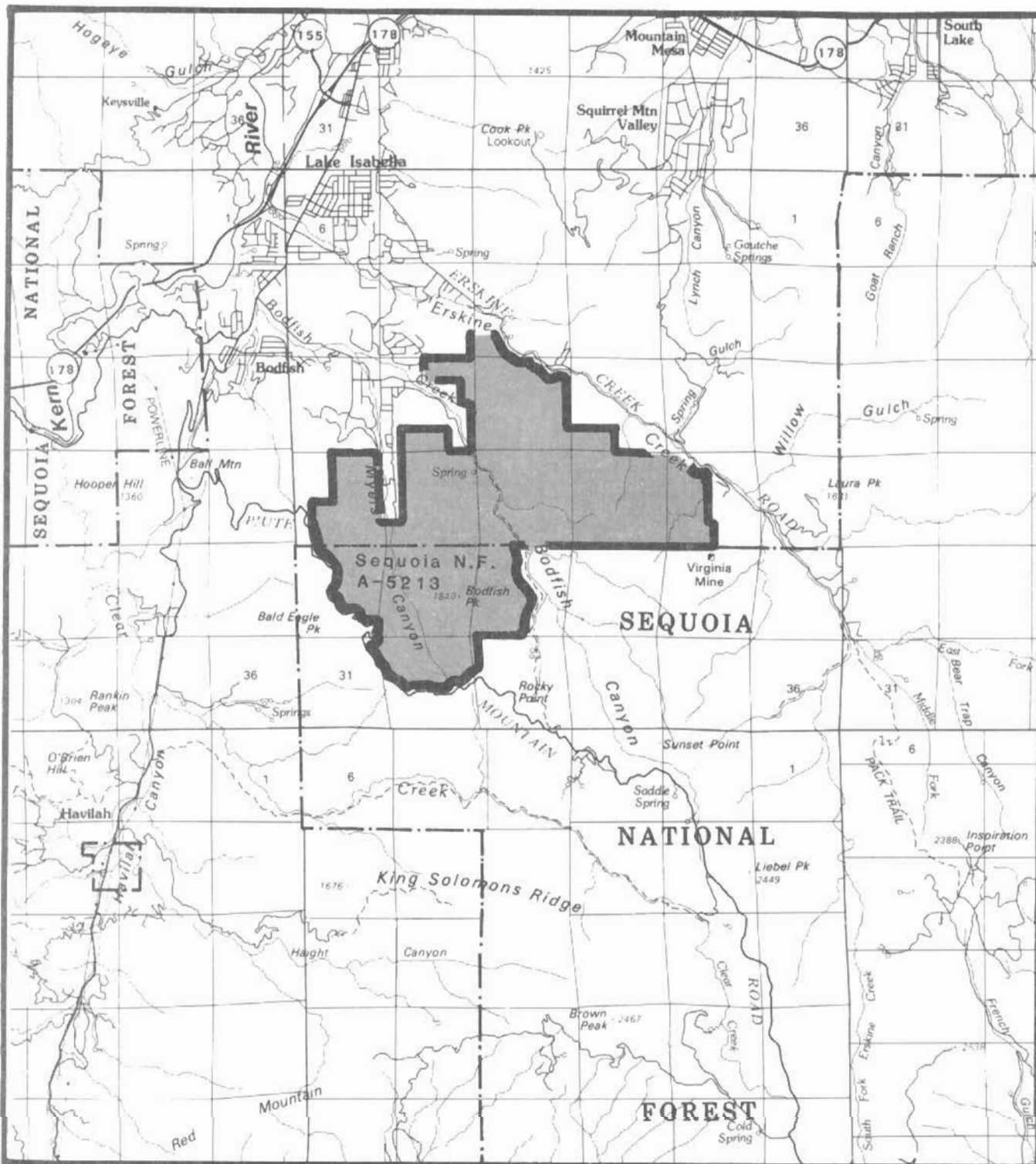
The WSA lends itself to other resource uses. The eastern portion of the study area is in the Erskine Creek Mining District which covers an area about five miles long and two miles wide. The district contains deposits of tungsten, gold, and antimony. As of May 1988, there were 15 mining claims within the boundaries of the WSA. Claims are worked sporadically. Based on updated geologic information, the high potential for the development of locatable minerals, primarily gold and tungsten, continues to exist.

Fire management plans for habitat improvement in the piute cypress grove require the use of mechanized fire equipment, support facilities, and firebreaks. As stated in the South Sierra Foothills Planning Area Public Summary/Rangeland Program Summary, fire is an important management tool for the piute cypress grove; the trees are dependent on fire for seed germination. In accordance with current fire management plans, total fire suppression is practiced in the WSA to protect the bordering community of Bodfish.




Recent community expansion of Bodfish up to the boundary of the WSA indicates probable future demand for additional community development and recreation. Furthermore, the adjacent development presents outside influences that are incompatible with primitive experiences and solitude.

As part of the Monache-Walker Pass NCLWMA, the area is managed in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDF&G) for the benefit of its wildlife resources. Both BLM and CDF&G have been involved in habitat improvement projects, especially water developments, which have significantly improved the habitat for upland game species. Wilderness designation would constrain management options; motorized vehicle access to install additional water developments would be restricted in the area. The piute cypress groves are already protected by their designation as a BLM Natural Area and USFS Botanical Area. The three candidate T&E plant species (Piute jewel flower, Squaw root, and Kern River larkspur) also found in the area are protected by the Endangered Species Act.

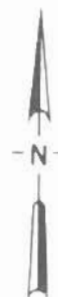
The area's irregular shape, combined with a lack of topographical or cultural features to delineate the boundaries, would make managing the area as wilderness difficult. Extensive signing, and in specific cases, fencing of the boundaries would be necessary. The WSA's topographical boundaries lend themselves to vehicular trespass from bordering communities. There are approximately three and one-half miles of routes of travel including primitive ways, washes and other unmaintained routes of access which will remain available for vehicular use.



- | | | |
|---|------|---|
|  | NONE | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |
|  | | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |
|  | | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |

- | | |
|---|--------------|
|  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | STATE |
|  | PRIVATE |

**Piute Cypress
Proposal
MAP-1**



010-046
JUNE, 1988

TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	3,453
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
USFS	(surface and subsurface)	1,760
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		5,213
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	0
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	3,453
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
USFS	(surface and subsurface)	1,760
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		3,453
Total USFS Land Not Recommended for Wilderness ¹		1,760

¹The USFS has agreed to allow these lands, located in the Sequoia National Forest, to be reported as part of BLM's WSR. When Congress acts, the lands will be managed in accordance with the current approved management plan.

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA has some degree of naturalness. The unit includes a dense grove of dwarf piute cypress growing on the steep north-facing slope of Bald Eagle Peak. The lower slopes are digger pine, California juniper and dense brush. The steep, rocky, south- and west-facing slopes are dense chaparral.

Imprints of man's activities include: mining scars, primitive vehicle routes, and firebreaks. Numerous mining claims are located in the eastern portion of the WSA. The use of mechanized equipment for fire management and the noise and surface disturbance associated with mining activities adversely impact the naturalness of the WSA.

2. Solitude: Steep canyons and dense vegetation provide excellent opportunities for solitude in the southern end of the WSA. Toward the northern end of the WSA, sparse vegetation, private land practices, the proximity of bordering communities, and generally open terrain provide limited opportunities for solitude. Also, noise associated with mining activities and recreational OHV use on the three and three-quarter miles of primitive road adversely impact solitude.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and unconfined recreation: Opportunities exist in the WSA for users to participate in primitive and unconfined recreational activities. Much of the area is covered with dense, low-lying brush forming natural barriers that restrict human movement within the area. Also, surface disturbances, vehicle use, and construction associated with small-scale exploration and development of mining claims limit primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.
4. Special features: The WSA contains part of the world's largest piute cypress grove. Portions of this grove were designated as a Natural Area in 1965 for the protection of the rare and unique scientific values of the piute cypress. In addition, there are three candidate threatened and endangered plant species that occur on the western edge of the WSA. They are: Streptanthus cordatus var. pintensis (Piute jewel flower), Perideridia pringlei (Squaw root), and Delphinium purpusii (Kern River larkspur).

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 5,213 acres of the Sierran Forest/Juniper-Pinyon Woodland ecosystem. Although this WSA would add diversity to the types of ecosystems represented in the NWPS, the Bureau has recommended two WSAs with similar ecosystems (Owens Peak WSA and Sacatar Meadows WSA) as suitable for wilderness designation.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	5		49,787
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	5		49,787

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of 19 major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

Table 3 - Wilderness Opportunities for Residents of Major Population Centers

Population Centers	<u>NWPS areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Anaheim-Santa Ana	25	2,823,534	153	5,703,515
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Los Angeles-Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
Merced	33	3,957,550	25	348,753
Modesto	36	4,126,963	81	1,722,326
Oxnard-Ventura	23	2,195,198	85	2,703,260
Riverside-San Bernardino	22	2,031,054	205	7,658,649
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
Salinas-Seaside-Monterey	24	3,676,896	45	644,415
San Diego	15	1,043,680	100	3,378,814
San Francisco-Oakland	39	4,473,002	39	565,614
San Jose	27	3,765,512	29	352,748
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria- Lompoc	20	1,166,142	35	528,590
Santa Cruz	27	3,765,512	32	407,890
Stockton	35	4,061,833	46	601,496
Vallejo-Napa-Fairfield	44	4,832,667	74	2,100,862
Visalia-Tulare-Porterville	34	4,431,635	61	1,681,921
<u>Nevada</u>				
Las Vegas	46	3,507,293	311	11,186,463

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas:
The WSA is within 50 air miles of six BLM WSAs recommended for wilderness designation or partial designation; Owens Peak (CA-010-026), Sacatar Meadows (CA-010-027), Rockhouse (CA-010-029), Little Lake Canyon (CDCA-157), Owens Peak (CDCA-158), El Paso Mountains (CDCA-164), and Golden Valley (CDCA-170). The Domeland Wilderness managed by the Sequoia National Forest, fifteen miles to the northeast of the WSA, is the nearest designated wilderness area. Other nearby non-Bureau wilderness areas are the South Sierra and Golden Trout Wilderness Areas, also managed by the Sequoia National Forest, and the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park which is managed by the National Park Service.

C. Manageability

The Piute Cypress WSA is manageable as wilderness, but only with extreme difficulty. Manageability problems include the overall irregular shape with predominantly sectional (rather than topographic or cultural features) boundaries, leading to

difficult recognition on the ground. Frequent signing, detailed maps, patrolling and fencing along various segments of the border would be required to insure the integrity of the unit. Control of community expansion and off-highway vehicular trespass would prove difficult. Continued development of the 15 mining claims and the noise and visual intrusions associated with this development would hinder effective management of the area as wilderness. The wilderness values of the area are not outstanding.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of information known at the time of the preliminary suitability recommendation: The geology and mineral resources of the Piute Cypress WSA are described in the Affected Environment section of the 1987 BLM Wilderness Recommendations, Central California Study Areas Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS indicates the WSA may contain deposits of tungsten, gold, antimony, copper, silver, uranium and decomposed granite. The WSA is in the Erskine Creek mining district which produced tungsten, gold and antimony around the turn of the century. Tungsten was also produced in the 1940s and 1950s. The EIS states that metamorphic rocks were the primary source of tungsten, while quartz veins in or near the metamorphic rocks were primary sources of gold and antimony. Gold was also indicated to be in placer material (sand and gravel deposits). The geologic environment was not considered to be conducive to the accumulation of oil and gas or any other leasable minerals; decomposed granite deposits were considered to be too far from local markets and too inaccessible to have any value. According to BLM records in 1986, the WSA was covered by 15 unpatented mining claims, most of which had underground workings or prospects.

Mineral surveys were conducted for USFS Cypress Rare II Area from 1980 to 1982. This Rare II area is adjacent to the southern boundary of the WSA. The results of these surveys were published in 1983 as U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Miscellaneous Field Studies Map MF-1532-A and U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) Open-File Report MLA 64-83. USGS/BOM concluded that the eastern half of the Rare II area had a probable mineral resource potential for gold and silver in the igneous (plutonic) rocks of the Isabella Granodiorite formation. Two fingers of this formation extend into the central portion of the WSA. Three fingers of calcareous metamorphic rock are exposed in the eastern and western portions of the WSA. These rocks have yielded tungsten and base-metals from skarn deposits. Based on the above data, this WSA is given a

moderate potential rating for the occurrence of gold, silver and tungsten using the BLM mineral resource classification scheme (see accompanying mineral potential map).

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation, which should be considered in the final recommendation: Because this WSA is recommended non-suitable by BLM, no USGS or BOM mineral surveys were conducted. BLM records dated May 6, 1988, showed no mineral leases, or mineral material sales contracts/permits in this WSA.

The distribution of unpatented mining claims in this WSA is summarized in the table below:

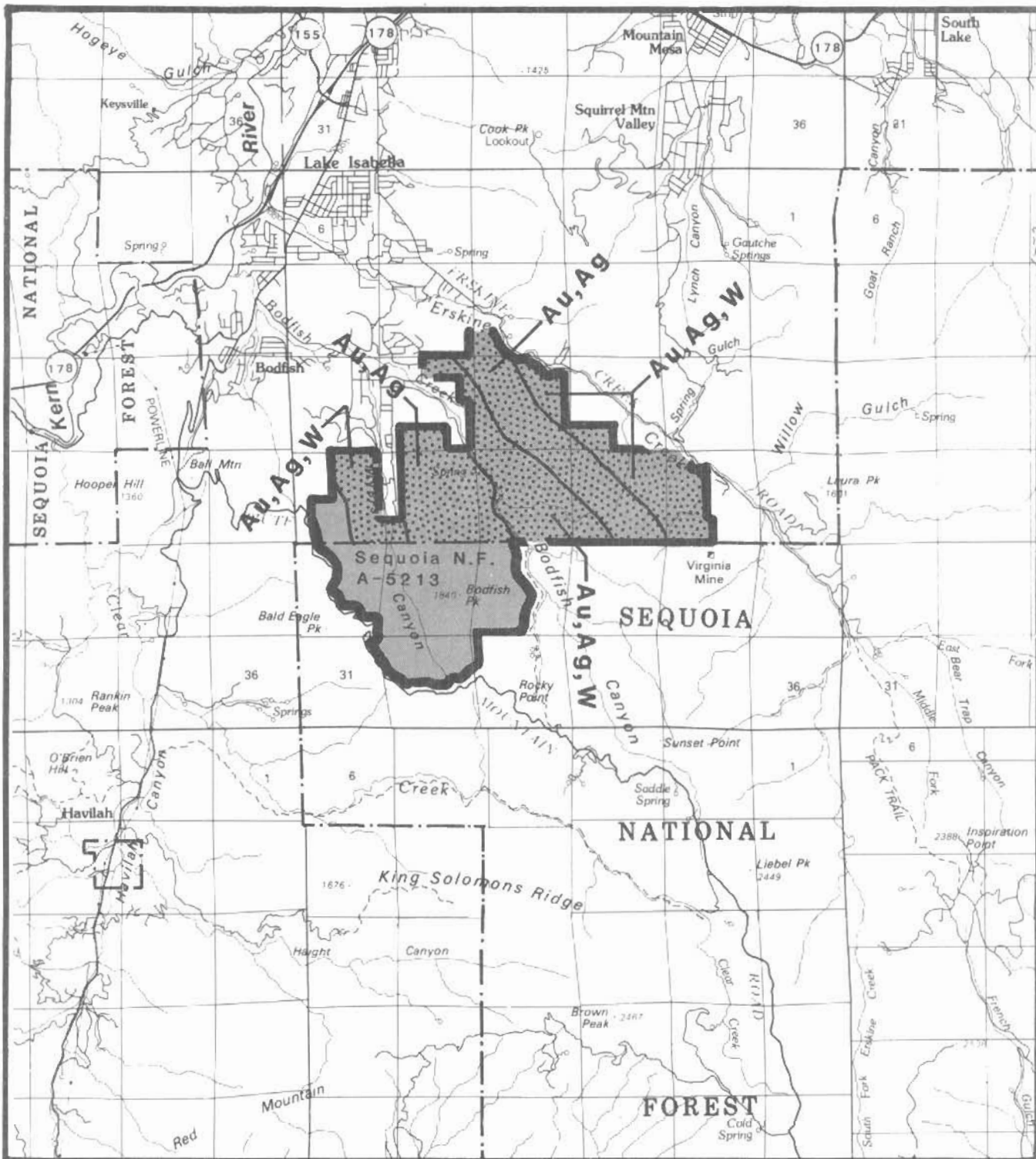
No new mineral resource data has been generated for this WSA as of May 3, 1988.

Table 4 - Mining Claims

	NO.			ACRES		
	SUITABLE	NONSUIT.	TOTAL	SUITABLE	NONSUIT.	TOTAL
Mining Claims						
Lode	0	11	11	0	220	220
Placer	0	3	3	0	120	120
Mill Sites	0	1	1	0	5	5
Total	0	15	15	0	345	345

E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Central California Study Areas - Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement.)



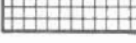

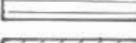



T26S
T27S



T27S
T28S

R32E R33E

R33E R34E

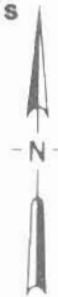
-  NONE Recommended for Wilderness
-  Recommended for Non Wilderness
-  Land outside WSA Recommended for Wilderness
-  Split Estate
-  State
-  Private

Explanation

-  High Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
-  Moderate Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
- M** Moderate Mineral Potential Location in a High Mineral Potential Area
- H** High Mineral Potential Location in a Moderate Mineral Potential Area

Commodity Symbols

- Ag** Silver
- Au** Gold
- W** Tungsten



Piute Cypress
Mineral Resource Potential



Map-2
010-046

Table 5 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impact on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values within 600 acres would be adversely impacted as a result of the noise and surface disturbance associated with the exploration and development of mineral resources. Approximately 300 acres of naturalness would be lost with the perception of naturalness and the sense of solitude impaired within an area of approximately 600 acres as a result of mining activities. Projected recreational OHV use (50 visitor-days per year) would have negligible impacts on wilderness values. The use of mechanized equipment for fire suppression would result in short-term minor impacts to naturalness. Special features would be retained within the WSA.	Wilderness values within 500 acres would be adversely impacted by projected mineral development which would continue as a result of anticipated valid existing rights. Surface disturbance and noise associated with mining activities would result in a loss of naturalness on 250 acres with the perception of naturalness and sense of solitude impaired within 500 acres. Wilderness values throughout the remainder of the WSA would be retained.
Impact on Mineral Exploration and Development*	Mineral exploration and development would not be impacted under the Proposed Action. The WSA would remain open to mineral exploration and development of existing and future mining claims.	Wilderness designation would withdraw the entire WSA from mineral appropriation and entry subject to valid existing right. It is anticipated that the majority of the 39 mining claims within the WSA would be determined to be valid and small scale development of potential mineral resources (other than within valid existing claims) would be foregone.

* Note: New minerals information has been obtained since this analysis; refer to the energy and minerals section in this report.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Final EIS. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

During the inventory phase, a few comments addressed potential resource values of the unit, such as off-highway vehicle recreational opportunities and potential oil and gas reserves. One comment recommended wilderness status to protect the area around the Piute Cypress Natural and Botanical Areas. However, the Natural Area, as delineated, already provides an adequate buffer around the actual piute cypress groves. The Natural and Botanical Area designations provide for the protection of the groves.

During the study phase, a public hearing was held in Fresno, California. During the public hearing and the comment period, a total of forty-two comments were received, both oral and written, relating specifically to this unit. Four comments supported the Bureau's no-wilderness alternative. Thirty-eight supported the all-wilderness alternative.

One comment was received from the Sequoia National Forest clarifying the use of the term "public lands".

No other Federal, State or County agency comments were received specific to this WSA.